

## **Testimony for the CPR Commission hearing on Education, Training and Volunteerism**

The recommendations to eliminate county superintendents and county boards and to replace them with more geographically large service regions would result in the loss of vital services currently available to students, schools, and school districts.

For example, Imperial County Office of Education currently serves more than 330 severely handicapped students. Some are medically fragile, and regrettably, two to three of these students pass away each year because of their medical conditions. Were these students and their families obliged to report to either San Diego, a distance of 120 miles, or Riverside, a distance of 180 miles, for medical, psychological, or due process meetings, they would endure much needless travel for service. Currently, especially in rural areas like ours, the Special Education Local Planning Area provides local, efficient services that the school districts appreciate because of the financial economies of scale realized by the local county office of education operating such programs on the districts' behalf. This program already serves a geographic area of more than 4500 square miles. Were the services to be provided by either San Diego or Riverside counties, they would find it necessary to operate an office in Imperial County at little cost savings to the current service plan.

Consider for a moment that El Centro is closer to either San Diego or Riverside than some other rural areas in northern California that might no longer offer these services were the existing county superintendents eliminated.

Local school boards and superintendents support the local county superintendents because they are local and therefore more accessible and accountable for service for their children and schools. Many county offices provide business and payroll services for small school districts which might not otherwise be viable without these services. More importantly, county superintendents provide strong support for increasing student achievement in school districts through teacher training, principal training, and coaching for increased achievement. As a critical part of the school accountability program, much of this work now occurs directly in schools and depends on strong relationships between district superintendents and the county superintendent.

County superintendents are often called on by other social service agencies and county boards of supervisors for leadership. Examples include county superintendents serving on Proposition 10 Commissions, even chairing them and serving as the responsible fiscal agent for them. Many county superintendents operate childcare programs and advocate for universal, high quality childcare. They also serve on local Workforce Investment Boards and similarly chair meetings of workforce training providers and business representatives. This personal, local leadership would not be possible in a larger-scale regional service model.

In Imperial County, I chair monthly meetings of the Interagency Steering Committee comprised of the local sheriff, a police department chief, the county chief executive officer, the heads of the health, social services, probation and behavioral health services

departments, as well as the president of the community college and the dean of the San Diego State University campus in our county. We review data and develop action plans to improve the quality of life in our county through collaboration and sharing resources to address local problems determined to be priorities. The county superintendent has chaired this group since 1987. This valued leadership has evolved primarily because county superintendents are often viewed as objective, innovative leaders who can be counted on to solve problems.

County superintendents serve as the conveners of P-16 Councils whose purpose is to work with colleges and universities, local school districts, college recruiters and outreach services to increase college eligibility and attendance and close the achievement gap for under-represented student populations. We train school counselors, teachers, and administrators to work with parents and students to promote a college going culture in families not traditionally accustomed to viewing college as a realistic goal.

In many counties the county superintendent operates or facilitates technology services for the local school districts, including providing school and classroom service for connecting students to the internet.

**In combination, these services result in significant benefits for local communities that could not be as effectively delivered from greater distances.** The fiscal savings achieved from eliminating county superintendents would result in the loss of many

hundreds of thousands of dollars through lost leadership and the power of collaboration that county superintendents bring to their local communities.

For many years, the University of California attempted to provide services on a statewide basis through their campus outreach efforts. They discovered that many students, mostly in rural, geographically isolated areas, were underserved and under-represented at the university campuses. Now, the university is working with local county superintendents to find ways to maximize service to those rural areas through regional collaboration and partnership.

As I reflect on these lessons, I find that county superintendents already serve regional needs, and I have observed that when county superintendents require outside assistance, they solve that problem by working with other county superintendents to see that the local needs of students, schools, and school districts are met. This practice preserves the benefits of local leadership focused on delivering effective services while achieving the benefits of collaboration with other county superintendents as required.

**Are there any real benefits to be gained by the proposal to eliminate the county superintendents of schools and replace them with geographically larger areas less able to meet local student and school needs and less accountable to the local school districts and voters who support them? I think not.**

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